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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 002972

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [GG](#) [RS](#)

SUBJECT: GOR HOLDS ON TO TROOP WITHDRAWAL DESPITE RECENT
VIOLENCE

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Alice G. Wells for reasons
1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The GOR has termed the October 3 bombing in Tskhinvali, which killed eight Russian troops, a terrorist act. Various calling the blast an attempt to provoke new military action, destabilize South Ossetia, or prevent Russia from fulfilling its Sarkozy-Medvedev obligations, GOR agencies are reacting quickly to fulfill President Medvedev's instructions to investigate the incident and "take all necessary steps to prevent criminal acts against Russian peacekeepers." Nevertheless, both FM Lavrov and the MFA Special Envoy for South Ossetia confirmed that Russia would not use the blast or other recent incidents in the region to postpone the withdrawal. Russia used the attack to underscore the danger of rearming Georgia, calling into question Tbilisi's commitment to no use of force. End Summary.

Goal: Destabilization or Delay

¶2. (U) Russian authorities reacted strongly to news of the blast in South Ossetia on October 3 that killed eight Russian troops (Vremya Novostey said the death toll was nine Russian troops and two local residents). On October 6, the MFA condemned the attack along with more recent violent incidents -- on October 5, a construction worker in Tskhinvali was killed, and on October 6 there was an explosion near a column of Russian forces departing an area near Abkhazia -- and spoke of an attempt to provoke new military action. However, the MFA noted FM Lavrov's letter to his French counterpart Kouchner, reaffirming Russia's intent to comply with its obligation to withdraw from Georgia proper by October 10. Lavrov called on the EU monitoring forces to take necessary measures to stabilize the situation in Georgia.

¶3. (SBU) Reacting to President Medvedev's order for a "painstaking investigation" into the car bomb blast, plus a tightening of security in South Ossetia, instructing the Ministry of Defense (MOD) to take "all necessary steps to prevent criminal acts against Russian peacekeepers and the civilian population," the chairman of the Investigations Committee of the Procurator, Vladimir Markin, announced that a criminal case had been opened on suspicion of murder, followed by a separate case on suspicion of a terrorist act. Preempting the results of the investigation, Markin added that preliminary investigations had shown that the Committee had "all grounds" to believe the terrorist act had been organized by Georgian special forces, with the "intent to destabilize the situation in the independent (South Ossetian) republic."

¶4. (U) The MOD in turn released a statement calling the explosion in Tskhinvali a planned terrorist act, but posited that the act was "aimed at preventing the sides from implementing the clauses of the Medvedev-Sarkozy plan."

Withdrawal on Schedule

¶5. (C) In an October 7 meeting, MFA Special Envoy for South Ossetia Yuriy Popov said he was "absolutely positive" the Russian troops would be withdrawn by October 10. The information and public relations service of the Russian Infantry Forces also reported that Russia was meeting its withdrawal obligations earlier than agreed.

Playing up Danger of Georgian Rearmament

¶6. (C) The explosion underscored PM Lavrov's September 30 statements that Russia intends to "demilitarize Georgia," using both observers on the ground and no-fly zones near the borders to the breakaway regions, and his continued objection to any decision to rearm Georgia. In his September 29 press conference in New York, Lavrov repeated his criticism of the West's arming Georgia "beyond any meaningful defense needs," including by "covert means." Working level MFA contacts reinforce Lavrov's comments, and point to alleged statements by members of President Saakashvili's inner circle threatening renewed military activity as further proof of the unreliability of Tbilisi's promises of no use of force.

Comment

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¶7. (SBU) Russia appears determined to uphold its side of the Sarkozy-Medvedev agreement to withdraw its troops from Georgia proper by October 10, but will certainly use the October 3 attack to justify Russia's intention to station 7,600 troops in the breakaway regions.
RUBIN